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AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow
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ABSTRACT

Assessment procedures for school principals need to be valid, reliable, and utilitarian. They should emphasize the humane elements of the school setting, and they should reflect a concern for a safe school environment. Breaking these requirements into component parts allows the development of five-point Likert scales teachers may use to assess principals. A school that emphasizes a problem-solving philosophy, also called "experimentalism," will stress the importance of principal proficiency in selected areas. Taking a behavioral approach also leads to the determination of precise objectives for a principal to attain, and these may be expressed as a percentage of change in a particular student behavior. The school principal may also be assessed by using criteria from a constructivist educational philosophy. With regard to assessment as well as other aspects of the educational setting, the principal needs to be open to change that includes technological advancement. The principal's role in building-level school reform is crucial for successful reorganization and curriculum development. (SLD)

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ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Marlow Ediger

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ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

There is much assessing of the school setting in terms of student achievement. Thus, students are tested at interval to ascertain achievement in different academic areas. Teachers are to be held accountable for student achievement and might be assessed based on how well students are doing in test results. The school principal is next in line to be assessed in terms of objectives. There are schools in which principals are assessed by teachers; However, the momentum here is not as great as compared to assessing student and teacher effectiveness.

Assessment procedures of school principals need to be

1. valid. The assessment procedures then harmonize with vital objectives for school principals to achieve.
2. reliable. Consistency of results should be in the offing if test/retest, alternative forms, and/ or internal consistency approaches are used.
3. utilitarian. The items for assessing represent relevant objectives that assist students/school personnel to attain, grow, and develop.
4. affective. They need to emphasize humane elements in the school setting, such as good human relations, recognition of accomplishments, and developing feelings of belonging.
5. security conscious. News headlines and school personnel indicate the necessity of stressing a safe school environment for teaching and learning.

Items three through five of the above enumerated statements may be broken down into component parts so that specifics may be assessed in terms of school principal leadership. For example in item number three, the following may be written to assess the work of the principal:

1. assists in choosing vital objectives for student achievement.
2. suggests interesting learning opportunities so that students may attain these desired ends.
3. emphasizes using a variety of evaluation techniques to ascertain learner progress.
4. develops a quality school climate for all to achieve as optimally as possible.
5. helps teachers with discipline problems in the classroom and school setting.

Each of these statements may then be used for teachers to respond to on a five point Likert Scale.

Objectives to use in the assessment process will depend upon the

philosophy of the involved school. Thus, careful attention needs to be paid to which philosophy/philosophies are being stressed by those involved in the assessment process.

A Problem Solving Philosophy

A school emphasizing a problem solving philosophy, also named experimentalism, will stress the importance of principals being proficient in selected areas of responsibility. One area is to be able to identify and clearly state vital problems encountered. This means that a principal can separate the relevant from those of lesser importance in terms of problems encountered in a school. Once the problem(s) have been chosen, the principal needs to be proficient in gathering information to solve the problem. Some problems need to be solved immediately. Others are long term in finding solutions. A repertoire of responses to the problem then need to be in the offing. When there is much time available to solve a problem, a variety of reference sources may be studied and used to gather data. The response results in an hypothesis which needs to be appraised in a practical situation. Feedback from the appraisal may result in trying out a different procedure. Leaving as is or modifying the hypothesis are further options. Hypotheses are tentative and not absolutes.

A principal who is a good problem solver might then pursue the following, as an example:

1. notice discipline problems when a teacher is on bus duty. The identified problem is discussed with teachers.
2. information is gathered in relationship to the problem by arriving at a solution cooperatively with teacher involvement.
3. The tentative solution or hypothesis is tried out the next school day involving bus duty.
4. If the solution worked, it is left as is. If not, modification of the solution may be made, or a completely y different hypothesis may need to be worked out and accepted tentatively. Each hypothesis is tentative and must be tried out in a practical situation.

With experimentalism as a philosophy of education, the principal needs to be assessed in terms of being able and skillful to identify relevant problems, gather related information, develop an hypothesis, and try the tentative hypothesis in a lifelike situation. Flexibility here is important in that hypotheses that do not work need to be changed.

Principals here may be known as trouble shooters in that problem identification and solutions must be in the offing. Involving of teachers in problem solving stresses democracy as a way of life in the school setting. To extend democratic tenets, students may also be involved in problem solving. Assessing leadership in experimentalist philosophy is

complex due to a lack of being able to measure precisely how well the principal is doing in each facet of problem solving. These facets are qualitative in nature and can be assessed on a five point Likert scale.

Behaviorism and the Assessment Process

Behaviorism emphasizes using precise objectives written prior to the beginning of a new school year to assess achievement throughout an interval of time, such as a semester or a full school year. A shorter interval of time could also be in the offing to assess principal progress. The stated precise objectives stress what a principal is to do to function effectively as a leader in the school setting. Either a principal has/has not achieved an objective when assessment procedures are in evidence and responded to by those involved from the principal's leadership. The principal knows in absolute terms which criteria need to be emphasized when viewing the precise ends at the time they are established. There is little/no interpretation of these criteria or standards of performance.

The following are examples of precise objectives for a principal to attain, determined for use in a new school year:

1. state mandated test scores will go up ten per cent as compared to a year ago.
2. discipline referrals of students to the principal's office will decrease by twenty per cent as compared to the previous interval of time when the principals achievement was assessed.
3. unexcused student absences will decrease by ten per cent as compared to the previous assessment.
4. tardiness of students will decrease by twenty-five per cent.
5. increase by ten per cent of students who will be reading at least on the grade level they are presently in.

Each of the above precise objectives have been arrived at cooperatively by the involved principal to be assessed together with those on the committee to draw up the criteria. Each objective to be achieved by the principal should be reasonable, not ridiculously complex. The focal point is on student achievement in school when viewing the five listed precise ends. Thus, students are to achieve at a higher level than previously, fewer discipline cases should be in the offing and thus provide more time for teaching and learning, fewer absences and cases of tardiness increases instructional time, as well as students ding a better job of reading should all work in the direction of students achieving at higher levels as compared to previously.

If precise objectives are not achieved by the school principal, increased energy levels need to be given to improve, grow, and develop. If there is a lack of progress toward goal attainment, covering several years of time, the principal may need assistance through the

following ways:

1. inservice education with classes in school administration taken at a local college/university.
2. attend state and national conventions sponsored by professional school administration.organizations.
3. do an independent research study on ways to improve the school curriculum.
4. work with a mentor to improve school administration procedures.
5. conduct a series of conferences with colleagues on ways to improve the role of the school administrator.

The precise objectives for the school administrator provide direction on what needs to be strengthened to be a quality leader in helping students achieve in teaching and learning. Quantitative, not qualitative, results are wanted here in assessing the school administrator (see Ediger, 1994, 169-174).

Constructivism and the School Principal

Constructivism emphasizes the principal assisting teachers to increase student achievement in contextual situations. Within each lesson and unit of study, students reveal what is being accomplished. Continual evaluation of learner achievement may then be in evidence. Students receive continual feedback and assistance, as needed, within a specific activity. Learning is contextual and is not revealed from isolated test items in which the test is given once a year. In context, students indicate continually what has been and what has not been learned. The school principal as educational leader needs to assist teachers in constructivist philosophy in the following ways:

1. indicate that learning is sequential and continuous in ongoing lessons and units of study.
2. assessment is continuous and permits providing assistance to students as revealed within a learning opportunity.
3. qualitative results are obtained from assessing ongoing student achievement.
4. daily student progress may be compared with previous progress, such as from the preceding school day.
5. self evaluation by students needs to be stressed.

The school principal may be assessed by using criteria from constructivism as a philosophy of teaching. Each of the five enumerated items, directly above, may be stated as broad standards to be used in the assessment process. Qualitative data may then be available to notice school principal progress in being the educational leader to guide

others in realizing objectives of instruction. Weak areas from assessment results may provide information to the principal on what to work on to be more effective in improving teaching and learning.

Constructivism as a philosophy of instruction needs clarification for teachers in terms of its inherent goals. The principal in a workshop and in inservice education may emphasize the following constructivism tenets to others in the school settling:

1. a philosophy of holism is involved when observing continuous progress of learners as compared to a single test score covering an interval of time such as one year in state mandated testing.
2. holism also emphasizes student self assessment procedures. Parents, too, may see products and processes of offspring.
3. diagnosis and remediation are salient concepts to stress in ongoing student endeavors in every day activities.
4. the student is the focal point of assessment, not high standards externally developed by the state department of education.
5. local involvement in curricular improvement is inherent rather than test writers of questions for testing who are rather far removed from the local level of instruction.

Change and the School Principal

One item that is certain is that things will change at a rapid rate. The school principal of today will need to be open to changes in the educational setting as well as in the societal arena. Klecker and Loadman (1999) wrote the following involving measuring principal's openness to change:

> The principal's role in building-level school reform is crucial for successful reorganization...
>
> From these findings, it can be inferred that to increase the building principal's actions to facilitate school change, steps should be taken to increase the principal's cognitive recognition that the changes will lead to increased student learning (feelings about change can be ignored). The assumption that the school changes will result in increased student learning may require a great "leap of faith' on the part of both the building principal and the school community (or a lot of solid evidence from future research!). Will the principal's openness to change measures vary with student learning increases?

Ediger (1998, 541-548) wrote:

> Change is a key concept in the school curriculum, as well as in society. School administrators need to evaluate the present curriculum. Changes may need to be made in terms of appraising **what is** to **what**

should be. Also, changes need to be made involving meanings attached to democracy as a way of life so that all might be accepted and respected. Thus, pupils need to experience the best in objectives, learning opportunities, as well as in evaluation procedures. There needs to be strong leadership when making changes in the curriculum. The principal needs to work in the direction of securing agreement upon which changes to make in a school. Adequate funds must be there for the making of changes. Stability of school leadership and teachers need to be in the offing to make changes which are ongoing. The lay community needs to be an active part involved in making these changes.

In supervising student teachers and cooperating teachers covering a period of thirty years, the writer asked the latter what they would like to see as traits/characteristics in a school principal. My records indicate that the following were stated most frequently:

1. being open minded and not dogmatic.
2. listening carefully when communicating ideas.
3. solving problems in the school setting.
4. wanting the best for teachers and students.
5. stressing humaneness when dealing with others.
6. recognizing teacher and student achievements.
7. emphasizing good human relations.
8. having good knowledge of the school curriculum. Ignorance here was mentioned quite frequently as a very undesirable standard.
9. demonstrating quality teaching through demonstration teaching.
10. empathizing with school personnel and students when illness and unfortunate situations occur.

The above statements may provide the basis in developing a rating scale for teachers to use in assessing the quality of work done by the principal in the school setting. I would add a statement to the above list involving how discipline problems are handled in the school arena. Another facet could pertain to emphasis placed upon inservice education and staff development. School personnel might then assess the school principal using the above enumerated criteria. The results should truly reflect the thinking and feelings of those doing the assessing. From the results, the principal might well stake out future actions to improve the school curriculum. The curriculum then refers to all occurrences that happen under the auspices of the local school setting. Thus, teachers should be able to teach and pupils should have opportunities to learn under the best situations possible in a safe school environment.

Technology and the Principal

Technology has its many uses to improve the curriculum. It can and

does provide a variety of learning opportunities for students to achieve as optimally as possible. Thus, CD ROMS, internet, programed materials (drill and practice, tutorial, diagnosis and remediation, gaming, and simulation), as well as multimedia may be used as instructional devices to assist students to attain objectives. Certainly, principals need to play a leading role in assisting teachers to use technology in the curriculum. Then too, technology has its many purposes to guide principals to keep up with educational trends and play a leadership role in the school setting. Examples are the following of how principals may keep up with what is being proposed and discussed in the school setting through e- mail use (Wheaton and Kay, 1999:

- Grade- level discussions
- State- based committee meetings
- Library improvement planning
- Literacy coordinator discussions
- Superintendent's council
- School network discussions
- School events forum...

The most important lesson we learned in the e-tool Project is that collaboration is abut people, not technology. When training, we are now spending more time on community building than we are on technology skills. Collaboration is simply the process of communication built upon a relationship between people. The process might be a letter, phone call, voice mail, e-mail or electronic discussion, but the purpose is to communicate to reach a goal. In our case the goal is to improve student performance.

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